

What is Teresian or Silent Prayer?

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Teresa's **salvation experience** is obvious. When we look at her life and her intimacy with Jesus we are forced to conclude that **something happened** especially when we consider where she came from.

The Lord made her in such a way that we can clearly see, and in an astounding way, **God's work in her**. At a certain point in her life, she could hardly enter into prayer without going into **ecstasy** which was apparent to everyone around her.

We, on the other hand, maybe don't have ecstasies, or at least not as often as St. Teresa, but do we fully realize the **miracle** that takes place **each time we pray**?

When we pray we might not have ecstasies, but the Lord is as **involved and united** with us as if we were having the ecstasies of St. Teresa. The ecstasies, visions and internal words of St. Teresa were **orchestrated** so that we could come to **understand the beauty of the mystery of prayer**.

Maybe we don't want to admit it to ourselves, but when we hear about Teresa's experiences, we tend to wish it was happening to us. When we read about her visions, we might be wishing we could have visions too.

What I found fascinating when I discovered St. Teresa was that she had a **relationship** with our Lord that went **both ways**. Not only did she speak to him, but he answered her! Her visions were a language I could understand without explanation. Jesus talked to her like I am talking to you. I could understand that. There was a **reciprocal relationship** between Teresa and Jesus and I **wanted that with my whole heart**.

Even if I hadn't completely understood that this reciprocal relationship wasn't always or even habitually about visions and internal words, it was definitely a two-way street. We see this intimacy between our Lord and Teresa.

How did this intimacy with Our Lord happen?

Teresa made a startling remark, she said: '**All good things that have happened to me have come from silent prayer**.' Twice at the beginning of the Interior Castle she said that the **castle's door is silent prayer** (1st mansion) and again the **castle's door is silent prayer and consideration** (2nd mansion).

We are going to **explore what silent prayer is**. If everything comes from silent prayer maybe we want to seriously **consider the practice**; and, if we truly **understand what happens in prayer**, we will be even more motivated to begin. When we really grasp what happens in prayer we will truly be able to put Teresa's advice into practice: The Door to the Castle is Silent Prayer. To begin we are going to **look at Teresa praying**.

'If you are suffering trials, or are sad, look at Him on His way to the Garden. What deep affliction He must have in His soul, to describe His own suffering as He did and to complain of it! Look at Him bound to the pillar, full of pain, His flesh all torn to pieces by His great love for you. How much He suffered, persecuted by some, spat upon by others, denied by His friends, and even deserted by them, with none to take His part, frozen with the cold and left so completely alone that you may well comfort each other! Or look upon Him bending under the weight of the Cross and not even allowing him to take breath: He will look upon you with His lovely and compassionate eyes, full of tears, and in comforting your grief will forget His own because you are keeping Him company in order to comfort Him and turning your head to look at Him.

"O Lord of the world, my true Spouse!" you may say to Him, if seeing Him in such a plight has filled your heart with such tenderness that you not only desire to look upon Him but love to speak to Him, not using ready-made prayer, but words coming from the compassion of your heart, which means so much to Him: "Are you so needy, my Lord and my Good, that you accept my poor company? Do I read in your face that you haven't found comfort, even in me? How can it be possible, Lord, that the angels are leaving you alone and that your Father is not comforting you?" W26

What did we just hear? In the beginning Teresa tells her sisters that if they are sad to look at Jesus, **consider** him. This is a **key** word in Teresa's vocabulary. In Spanish it is the word, **mirar**, which means **to look**. It is a very common word, but in Teresa's vocabulary it has a precise meaning. Sometimes it means to **look**, like I am looking at you, but sometimes it means what is often

translated by the word **consider**. Teresa often uses this word when referring to silent prayer.

What is she doing? What allows her to turn towards Jesus who is there suffering his passion? It's **Faith**. **Consideration** means to **look with faith**.

What is the **basis** of **silent prayer**? What is the **basis of recollection**? It's **Faith**, or to **look with faith**.

It makes sense. When you pray, without even thinking about it, you begin by turning yourself towards our Lord to whom you are going to speak. What allows you to turn towards our Lord? What allows you to know he is there? It's **Faith**.

In the long passage we just heard, does St. Teresa stop there? She begins somewhat 'coldly', though she is never really cold, by telling her sisters to consider him in the garden, etc. and she, I don't know if you noticed, while writing begins to consider him. She begins to look at Jesus and all of a sudden, she begins to **pray before our eyes**.

This is what makes her **style original**. It's part of her charism as the **Mother of Spiritual People**. She doesn't even realize it, but she is praying right in front of us. This is great because it shows us how to pray. We can enter into **her** prayer.

She begins to consider Jesus. We see that her pen is moving ever more rapidly as she prays, 'O Lord of the world, my true Spouse...' She realizes she is sliding, that she is no longer talking to her sisters, so she addresses them by saying: 'Here's what you can say to him if your heart is touched seeing him in such a state...'

Once finished talking to them Teresa resumes her prayer.

What moves Teresa as she looks at Jesus or considers him by faith? What is it that makes her overflow with emotion? It's **Love**! If there is love according to God, the Holy Spirit is never far away.

What is silent prayer then for Teresa? It is **believe to love**. I **consider by faith** to wake up love, a **supernatural love**. This is the **heart of prayer** according to St. Teresa. **When I believe to love I am practicing silent prayer** as far as St. Teresa is concerned. It is what she calls **recollection**. When I believe to love, I am **recollected**.

Now that we have seen what silent prayer is for St. Teresa, we have to go to the Gospel.

Please note that Teresian prayer isn't a parallel path. It isn't outside of the Gospel. It's to experience life according to the Gospel with certain accents inspired by the Holy Spirit. It's about putting the Gospel into practice.

In short, the Christian life is simply living life according to the Gospel. Therefore, it is important to read it often. **What is at the heart of the Gospel?**

Have you ever noticed when Jesus was standing in front of someone? He gave the impression to have one unique idea. He wanted to awaken the person in front of him to one thing, to one reality. What is at the heart of Gospel? What do you think it is? When a sick person arrived in front of Jesus, he asked the person what he wanted from him. For example, if the person was blind he could clearly see that the person was blind, so he could guess what he wanted. But Jesus wanted to bring about something within the person! **Faith!**

It's always Faith! **The Verb became incarnate to give us faith!** Why? Here are some **basic verses**.

John 20:31 These signs were written down so that you would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that in believing you have life in his name.

It was written down for what reason? So that you believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God (and do we stop at faith?) so that in believing you have life in his name. God became man so that we would have life. How are we going to acquire that life here on earth? By faith in Jesus, the Son of God, who died to save us.

This is the heart of the Gospel, everything is here: believe in Jesus to receive life; the effect of life is love! So here we find to believe to love.

How do I welcome the life that the Lord gives me? The Holy Spirit is the life I receive by believing in Jesus

John 19, when Jesus died on the cross and his side was pierced by the soldier, St. John points out that both water and blood poured out. The one who witnessed this and the one who knows he is telling the truth.

We have the formula of a **solemn witness** with **two testimonies**; the one who testified (1st witness); and the other says he knows that he is telling the truth (2nd witness). This is the formula of a **solemn witness** in the Bible. We can tell ourselves that a solemn testimony was made about the fact that there was both blood and water that came out of Jesus' side.

Maybe it wasn't essential, maybe it was only **secondary**? But, yes it was **essential** for St. John because blood and water are the signs! **Blood** is the **sign of life**. Jesus by dying on the cross gave his life and he communicated it. The **water** is the water of penance, the **forgiveness of sin**.

When I turn towards Jesus in faith, recognizing him as my Savior, my personal Savior, I welcome him into my life. I welcome the Holy Spirit.

The **goal of our life on earth**, and there isn't another, is to welcome the life of God. If I welcome the life of God on earth I will live in eternity with him in Heaven. The **goal of this life is the preparation for heaven** and nothing else. How do we **prepare**? We prepare by believing in Jesus to receive life or the Holy Spirit.

So now you understand that the **recollection of St. Teresa** is nothing other than the **living out of the heart of Christian life.... Believe to Love!**

Believe to receive life (Holy Spirit) and the **effect** of this **divine life** in me is **love**. Nothing else.

When Teresa says that the door of the castle is silent prayer, she is only reformulating in her own words the KERYGME (proclamation of the essential of Christian Faith. It refers primarily to the apostles in the NT).

It makes sense then when Teresa tells us that all the good that has come to her has come from silent prayer. **Silent prayer is to believe; by believing I receive Life which saves and transforms me.**

Can you see the logic? It's very coherent!

Having understood this important point which gives us the solid foundation to look at the **practical consequences** or how it plays out in our lives.

If **silent prayer is to believe to love** then I can't deprive myself of it a single instant in my life. If the **goal of my life** is to **receive this life of God** and if this **happens by faith**, I can't afford to

waste a single minute. I have to make an effort to seize each instant to believe. **How can I go about applying myself to believe?**

St. Teresa tells us that **it isn't easy to believe to love**. When we are caught up in daily life we don't necessarily even think about it. Since it isn't easy, it's important to **set aside a time daily** for God. In Carmel it is called the **vital daily prayer** time. We **set aside a time** that is **uniquely consecrated to believe to love**. Nothing else! Silent prayer is not uniquely a time of practice but rather a **meeting with someone**.

When I turn by faith towards Jesus, he's there for me. This is a deeper and even more beautiful reason to set aside this time; it's the **time I set aside to be with my friend**.

If I have a friend, I spend time with him and am even willing to **'waste time with him'**. He's not a friend that I tolerate when I'm doing something else; that's a co-worker. There is a difference between a co-worker and a friend. A co-worker is someone I am happy to be with when I am doing something else at work but isn't necessarily someone I would invite to my home.

Jesus doesn't want to be a co-worker in our lives, he wants to be **a real friend**. In other words, we need to invite him over and spend time with him. There are people who say that they pray and think of our Lord **all the time** but don't have **a set time** for prayer. They never take five minutes to be with him without doing something else.

You have started well so don't stop half way.

Right now, Jesus is a good work colleague, but he wants to become your friend. So, you need to invite him to your home and spend some time with him in prayer. **Try ten minutes**, it would make Jesus so happy. It's been years that he has been a good work colleague and has been desperately waiting to be invited to your home at last....for a time of prayer. He wants to be your friend.

The necessity of the time of prayer: what will we do during our time of prayer? **Believe to love sums it up.**

The first thing to do is to turn towards Jesus in his humanity. St Teresa insists that we turn towards the holy humanity of Jesus. The benefit of doing so is incredible. Why? Because there isn't another

name under heaven by which we can be saved. The one who saves us is Jesus glorified who died on the cross and resurrected to save us. There are no other names.

Here is a little image to help you understand the opportunity to turn specifically toward Jesus, He is the **fountain of salvation on earth**. The glorified humanity of Jesus is present in a completely unique, imminent and unimaginable way in the Holy Eucharist. He is the **unique foundation of salvation**, the **unique source of the Holy Spirit** in our world. There is no other.

So, what happens when we seek salvation in God in general? It's a good thing, but it's like drinking out of a puddle that formed from the overflow of the fountain bubbling away right next to you but out of ignorance we drink out of the puddle. It's in drinking out of the hose that feeds the fountain that we reap the benefits. **What are the benefits?**

1/ If I go to the humanity of Christ, my own humanity is **transformed**;

2/For my humanity to be transformed I need another humanity; when I approach God in general I leave a little parentheses --the most human elements of my humanity-- my body and my psychological make-up-- are cast aside. It's a great beginning though.

3/ When I go to Jesus in his humanity glorified, he has **arms** to hold me.

4/ When his humanity comes into contact with mine my humanity is deeply transformed and I have an **experience of salvation** that transforms me from the inside out. This is what St. Teresa experienced.

What does she say when she begins to pray?

"It was a great thing for me that God granted me the grace in prayer to understand what love meant because in a short time I saw **new virtues** in myself." (Life)

Virtues (or Qualities)

There are **two ways to welcome virtues**:

1/ through **practice** of the virtue, it becomes a **habit**, sustained by grace; it is necessary and all of us are concerned by it; But...

2/ The true Christian regime is the one that Teresa experienced. She turned towards Christ in his

glorified humanity who **transformed her humanity** and put qualities directly in her. ' I saw in a short time new virtues in myself'. She realized that she had a **new capacity** that she didn't have before. The Lord is dying to put qualities in our hearts as well.

The heart of salvation isn't a constant struggle but rather God who saves and transforms me.

Don't think that there is nothing for me to do except get comfortable in my lounge chair and wait! Not at all! I am aware of new virtues in myself but these **new virtues** are still too **weak** to keep us on the narrow path. Yes, I turned towards Jesus and he began to save me by placing virtues directly in my heart. They are still very small however.

Jesus is very timid and doesn't want to impose himself. He doesn't ever want to give us anything unless we say 'yes'. As for the virtues, he puts them there and then waits to see what effect they will have on us. What will we do? Will we try and practice them even though it requires a bit of effort on our part? If we do, it's our way of signaling to Jesus that our answer is yes. This **gives the Lord permission** to continue to make the virtues or qualities grow.

We can also **say no** which tells the Lord that we prefer our life as it is without virtues. Will the Lord accept my choice? Yes, of course he will. He is full of mercy. The seed didn't take when he planted it the first time, but he will try again. He is very patient and merciful.

What does the **Lord expect** from us when we receive and welcome the virtues?

Saint Therese of the little Flower's Conversion is a good example. It's a salvation story.

She had been to midnight mass where she received God in a strong and powerful way.

She needed to be saved from her crying. She was a prisoner of it. While going upstairs she heard her father say to her sister that this would be the last year as she was too old now.

When she heard her father, she started to cry but in a split second realized that she was able to **swallow her tears. She made the decision to swallow them. She said 'yes' in that split second on the stairs in her home and welcomed the gift**

of salvation given her at Mass. From that time on, she started to take giant steps forward on the spiritual path.

We are completely in the Christian life here. The Lord gives his salvation and it is up to the individual to implement it in his life by saying 'yes'.

The Exercise of his Presence

We discussed silent prayer; the need for a time of prayer; the central role of Christ in his humanity (try focusing on him, the benefits will be great); and now we are going to look at the **exercise of his Presence** outside of our times of prayer. If **Believe to Love** is the heart of my life, we have no time to waste!

The **first step** is the exercise of **the practice of the presence of God or the presence of Christ in his humanity. Throughout the day** without over exerting yourself, try to remember to take a moment to look at Jesus. You can't take a quick interior look at Jesus without something happening. You open the door for Jesus to enter. He gives you **his salvation** and **transforms you**. This is the **exercise of the presence of Christ**. Here are a few **concrete examples** of this practice from St. Teresa's life:

Before opening a convent, Teresa usually had about \$30 left over. She'd go to the market to buy religious artwork that represented Jesus and inspired her to pray to him.

Her convents were very small, poor but very clean. There were with **pictures of Jesus everywhere**. It wasn't possible to turn your head without seeing Our Lord. In the Way of Perfection she tells us that she wanted to see him everywhere she looked. So why wouldn't we want to **increase the number of pictures we have of Jesus or whatever helps us to think of him**? It's important to change them or change them around every so often so as not to get used to them. We don't want these reminders of Christ to become **invisible**.

If Christ is the heart of our lives, it's normal then for a Christian home to have a picture of Jesus in every room. The **goal of these pictures is to make you love him ever more**.

Mother Teresa really liked fluorescent statues of Our Lady of Lourdes because for some reason, special to her, they brought about devotion in her. It's about the presence of Jesus.

Exercise of the Virtues

The **last point** concerns the **exercise of the virtues**. A relationship with someone is not an intellectual exercise. **Love is shown by actions**. When we try and carry out our God-given duties for his sake we are in the right mindset even if we might not be thinking of him because we are preoccupied by a worrisome situation. Having the **right mindset in daily life is even more important** than when we are in prayer.

Doing his will is not saying Lord, Lord --- which is what we say in prayer --- It's in doing his will concretely by serving our brothers, fulfilling our responsibilities.

This is what St. Teresa called '**the exercise of the virtues**'. The **concrete love of our brother is not possible without prayer**. We can't love our brother without **recharging our batteries**. Our batteries are re-charged by spending time with our friend in silent prayer.

Conclusion

Jesus doesn't want us working 24/7, he wants us to rest. He would like us to take the time to have tea with him. He invites us to come and rest with him. As a matter of fact, he often invited his disciples to rest in the Bible: Come with me off the beaten path and rest. Mark 6:31

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